DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 085 644 CG 008 586

AUTHOR Rolfe, David J.
TITLE Preparing Groups of Engaged Couples for Marriage.
PUB DATE Oct 73
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the National Council on Family Relations, 16 through 20 October 1973, Toronto, Canada

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); Communication Skills; Goal Orientation; *Group Discussion; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Marriage; *Marriage Counseling; Money Management; *Program Descriptions; Sexuality; Speeches

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a program designed for preparing groups of engaged couples for marriage in circumstances where program time is limited to two afternoon sessions. Six topic areas are covered: Adjustments and Priorities; Communication Skills; Parenthood; Money Management; Religious Dimensions in Marriage; and Sexuality. The method used is one of structured group participation, utilizing short keynote talks, pencil and paper exercises, discussion exercises and open group discussion. Trained paraprofessional facilitators work with each sub-group of four engaged couples. (Author)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

ED 085644

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

PREPARING GROUPS OF ENGAGED COUPLES FOR MARRIAGE*

David J. Rolfe**

*A paper presented to the Education Section at the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, Toronto, Canada, October 19, 1973.

**David J. Rolfe, AAMFC, is a Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Family Ecology at Michigan State University, East Lansing Michigan, and Coordinator of Marriage Preparation Programs for several churches in Lansing, Michigan.

Copyright © 1973, David J. Rolfe

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
DAVID J. ROLFE
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

CG 008 586

PREPARING GROUPS OF ENGAGED COUPLES FOR MARRIAGE *

This paper outlines a program designed for preparing groups of engaged couples for marriage in circumstances where program time is limited. Six topic areas are covered: Adjustments and Priorities, Communication Skills, Parenthood, Money Management, Religious Dimensions in Marriage, and Sexuality. The method used is one of structured group participation, utilizing short keynote talks, pencil and paper exercises, discussion exercises and open group discussion. Trained para-professional facilitators work with each sub-group of four engaged couples.

For a long time, marriage preparation has been the forgotten step-sib of counseling. Engaged couples with gross problems have sometimes been counseled, depending on their willingness to seek out a counselor. Other couples have met one or more times with a clergyman. Many others receive no formal preparation whatsoever. It is only comparatively recently that professionals have been working to bring marriage preparation up from the level of a high school information course for individuals to a functional course focused on a couple's instrumental and affective relationship. Mace, probably the most eminent professional in this field, outlines three approaches to preparing couples for marriage:

1. "Facts of life approach" - assumes that couples who had problems did so because of ignorance.
2. "Encourage and help the couple to make a careful evaluation of themselves, of each other, and of their relationship."
3. Counsel those who ask for help. (Mace, 1972: 9)

---

*The author wishes to thank Dr. Margaret Bubolz, Chairman of the Department of Family and Child Sciences, Michigan State University, for her helpful critique and suggestions in preparing the final draft of this paper.

The counseling approach is not explored in this paper. Rather, the paper focuses on preparing those couples for marriage who feel they have few, if any difficulties. In other words, the vast majority of people who marry. Counseling implies the existance of a problem, something few people want to admit having.

The 'facts of life' or traditional approach has been one of a superior instructor conveying facts to ignorant novices. The attitude has been, "Do, think, behave in this way, and all will be well. If you do the 'wrong' things, these will be the consequences." Basically this approach has said, "Don't think or feel; just follow me. I am right." This is not to imply that all traditional instructors intended this to be the message. Unfortunately, however, this has often been the message that has been perceived.

The traditional approach was somewhat effective when factual information was not available. Also in past years, young couples were more willing to sit still and listen politely to speakers. In the past too, the speaker could with some validity say, "This is how we did it: follow us," and in so doing provide a functional model. The hidden agenda in this method is that if people know the right facts they will become happily married. This has the subsequent effect of labelling unhappy couples as mentally dull or sinful. After all, they were told the right things, so they should have done as they were told.

Times have changed. Today, factual information is easily available. Young people resent being lectured at. A pattern of marriage acceptable to an instructor may be meaningless to his audiance.

The course described in this paper is an attempt to put Mace's second approach into practice. The course asks couples what are their values in several areas, individually and jointly, are they satisfied with their mutual 'fit' of values, have they shared awareness of how they want their marriage to become in particular areas ? The course basically tries to say, "It will be your marriage. Are you both aware of what each wants it to become ?" The hidden agenda of this approach is that if couples gain better awareness of each other's values, expectations and needs, they will have a better chance to be happily married. Feeling facts and expectations are seen as more important than the 'how to do it' facts. Clarity in the former area allows better application of the latter.

The course attempts to attain the following goals:

1. Help each individual share his or her relative values and expectations of marriage.

2. Bring the couples' values, expectations more to conscious shared awareness.

3. Assist couples in experiencing how they may approach the same situation differently.

4. Increase the focus on their individual relationship rather than upon general standards for relationships.

5. Encourage anticipatory planning.

6. Provide an opportunity to discuss areas that may have been overlooked.

7. Confirm areas of strength.

8. Point to areas that need further attention and discussion.

9. Maintain a focus on the engaged couple's relationship.

Factual information about how to make a good marriage can be interesting, but it tells a couple very little about their relationship. Once a couple begins to look closely at their relationship, they can use their strengths more effectively as well as recognize any difficulties. Palmer observed that most problems in a marriage are evident before the wedding. (Palmer, 1972: 145-153) Burgess and Wallin devised a Marriage Prediction scale which measures quite accurately a person's probable success in marriage. (Burgess and Wallin, 1953: 485-502) However, knowing that one has a forty per cent chance of success helps very little. A person needs to go beyond the statistic and examine the particular relationship. The method described below attempts to go beyond the statistic.

METHOD

Professionals and para-professionals are used in a carefully coordinated way. Because of local needs, the entire program is dovetailed into two Sunday afternoons from 2:00 to 5:30. Each series needs a host couple who emcee the program, and para-professional facilitators for each group of four engaged couples. In addition, six speakers are required. The host couple needs some ability to organize a meeting, and keep the program on schedule. The speakers include a family life educator, doctor or nurse, a clergyman, a financial resource person and three other couples or individuals. The latter may be marriage counselors, psychologists or family life educators, but this is not absolutely necessary.

The facilitators can be high school seniors or university students. Our experience has shown that young persons, better yet if they are engaged, establish an effective rapport with the couples attending the program. Older persons (thirty and over), no matter how skilled, are often ignored because they are uncharitably labelled 'out of touch' by some of the engaged couples. Married couples too easily end up talking at length about their own marriages. This causes the focus to shift away from the engaged couples' relationships. If the focus shifts, the couples stop learning about 'us' and begin instead to learn about 'them.' This can be helpful to an extent, but it is of secondary importance in this program.

In practice, it has been found quicker and more effective to give

the host couple and speakers a complete manual of all materials used, including discussion and talk outlines. When they have all read the materials, they meet with the program coordinator and run through the complete program. Explicitly this means doing the Getting Aquainted Exercise (see below), which gives the host couple and speakers familiarity with the approach used, and starts them off working together as a team. In addition, each talk is briefly gone over, and the particular speaker, along with others interested, works on the pencil and paper or other exercises connected with his or her talk. The coordinator makes sure that speakers understand the approach desired, and the 'punch lines' that are part of some of the talks. The facilitators go through the same process, plus learning how to lead group exercises. If the facilitators have pledged themselves to work at several series of programs they can up-grade their skills to the stage where they ask couples in their groups more penetrating questions. We have found this can be accomplished through having hour-long feedback meetings for the facilitators after each session. At these meetings they each describe their groups. We focus in detail on what worked in stimulating discussion, on those couples who were hard to work with, and how the facilitators feel about the program. These sharing meetings have been most productive. A helpful biproduct has been that the facilitators' confidence has increased and their anxiety abated. After the meetings they reported that their groups ran much better and achieved a positive group feeling faster.

CONTENT

Content consists of an Introduction, Getting Aquainted Exercise and six focus areas: Adjustments and Priorities, Communication Skills, Parenthood, Money Management, Religious Dimensions in Marriage, and Sexuality.

FIRST SESSION

Introduction and Welcome (5-10 minutes)

Some couples may be present against their will. (True of some Catholic couples at Catholic-sponsored programs.) Others expect to be lectured at. Often some people present are not members of the sponsoring church. Such persons are asked to raise their hands as the host identifies each group. Non-church members should be assured that they will not be prosletysed. Those expecting long lectures are informed that the talks are short and informal. People who are unwilling participants are commiserated with. Their resentment at being forced to attend is acknowledged, and they can be congratulated for having the honesty to openly own having these feelings. The host can encourage them to try and get something out of the program. This

approach goes a long way toward relaxing the entire group.

Getting Acquainted Exercise (30 minutes)

This exercise very closely follows Clarke's exercise as used in his Marriage Enrichment Program. (Clarke, 1971 and 1970: 324-328) Each person takes three minutes to interview another group member (not his* fiance) and then they reverse roles for another three minutes. In addition to asking names and wedding date, they ask about favorite hobbies, personal aspirations, and qualities that each possesses in himself and which he is thankful to have. At the end of about seven minutes, in turn around the circle of four engaged couples, each person introduces to the others, the person he just interviewed. The facilitator helps people to stick to the questions, and discourages general unfocused gossip. This exercise helps people feel more relaxed. To an extent, they feel more among friends rather than thrown in with a group of total strangers. This exercise is even more effective, and sets the tone for more profound discussions, when group members already know each other prior to attending the program.

Money Management (60 minutes)

The program starts off with this topic for several reasons. We have tried discussing money as the final topic on the program, but too often people don't have the energy to involve themselves in such a topic at the end of a program. It also fits well at the beginning of the program because the exercises we use help couples focus on themselves as couples rather than as individuals, and then broadens the focus to include the other members of their small group. All the same, this is a difficult subject to discuss: no one likes to be told how to handle their income. People often feel that since they can make change, are by nature rational, and have not gone bankrupt, they can therefore effectively manage their money. To further complicate matters, some people perceive a discussion on money management as a command to follow a set way of management, and they go into a state of rebellion.

The speaker gives a 15 minute talk designed to get people thinking about money matters. He refers them to the materials handed out, and generally tries to get them open to the idea of using the materials to plan their finances. The more experienced the group (most of them living away from their parents' home, and self-supporting), the less time is spent on such things as the cost of renting an apartment in this area, and other basic local cost facts.

Each couple is given a copy of the following:

A Shopper's Guide to Life Insurance (1972)
A Shopper's Guide to Term Life Insurance (1973)
Selecting and Financing a Home (1972)

* throughout this paper, 'he' and other male pronouns will be used for convenience, and to avoid the cumbersomeness of repeating 'he and she' or 'her and him.'

Family Food Budgeting (1971)
Cost of Operating an Automobile (1972)
Complete Guide to Family Money Management (1973)*

Previously, in a lecture-oriented program, we had attempted to cover the basic facts and figures of money management: the result pleased nobody. By handing out the above mentioned materials which nicely cover the 'content' of money management, we are able to spend more time helping couples examine their process for handling money.

In his 15 minute talk, the speaker explians that a budget functions not to restrict spending, but to assist in allocating funds in such a way as to allow maximum return on income. He also raises the point that the ammount of money a couple have or do not have is seldom the main problem. It is the way money is managed that causes difficulties. He can remind couples that 90 per cent of marital breakdowns involve mismanagement of money. (Duncan, 1973: 4) The speaker asks couples to speculate why it is that everyone does not plan the same way. Most groups come up with a variety of answers which gives the speaker the opportunity to conclude that much depends on the values people have, and that these values influence, even determine how people spend and save. This provides a good opener for the exercise which follows. The exercise helps individual couples focus on their relative values as applied to money management.

Exercise - Financial Priorities Inventory (Rolfe, 1972 and 1973)

Couples are separated, and men and women sent to opposite sides of the room. They will need ten to fifteen minutes to finish filling out the inventory. The FPI consists of ten sections. The first is a list of 36 budget categories. A person chooses the ten most important and ranks them in order of importance. Other sections of the FPI ask how much money will be needed for comfortable married living; who will write checks and pay bills; how much say each partner will have in financial decision making. The final sections get the respondent to estimate how much he is willing to spend to purchase a car, and how much for rent. He is also asked to indicate how much he feels he could safely spend purchasing a home, and what mortgage terms he thinks are reasonable. Lastly, he gauges how much debt, for everything except house payments, he can tolerate in the first year of marriage.

Upon completion of the inventory, couples get back together and compare their priorities. When the conversation has subsided somewhat, the speaker asks, one category at a time for couples' degrees of consensus on items. For example, how many couples have seven or more items in common on section one. Those couples who have talked over money management in detail before the sessions often have the satisfaction of finding themselves scoring close to each other in many of the sections on the FPI. Couples who are poorly prepared in this area

* Publishers are listed under References. Many of these items are updated periodically. Total cost to supply these materials is about $2.25 per couple.

get this fed back to them as they see others around them reporting greater degrees of consensus than they have.

The final 15 minutes of this section are used in a group exercise. By now, most of the couples have discussed their priorities in some detail, and in most of the small groups, they have shared some or all of their findings with other couples. The exercise which follows is designed to give each person insight into how his partner, and other people, might handle dilemmas in money management. The Money Management Exercise consists of 12 cards, separately numbered and each describing a predicament. Cards 1 through 9 are designed for the women; cards 4 through 12 for the men. The facilitator holds the pack of cards, and has each person choose a number before they get to see what is printed on the cards. When each group member has a card, they take turns to read out their predicament, and say how they would handle it. The facilitator encourages comment after each response, and this can quite easily lead into a general discussion of how various group members actually have handled such a situation, or how they plan to should it arise.

Example: MAN or WOMAN #7

> I loaned my brother $50 a few weeks ago, and now I really need the money back. He says he cannot repay me. He thought the $50 was a brotherly gift, and so he feels he shouldn't have to repay me. Somehow I'm going to have to explain the missing $50. My spouse didn't know that I had made the loan initially, and now is questioning me about how come we are short of money. What am I going to do about this situation ?

Sometimes, the speaker needs more time at the beginning of this whole topic to explain money management details, and answer questions. If this happens, part 1 of the Financial Priorities Inventory may be omitted, and couples encouraged to complete it at home.

At the end of the day, couples will take home with them a topical sheet entitled 'You Paid How Much For That ? (Changing Times, 1972)* This has two lists of items, one for how much she would expect to pay for items such as a gallon of latex paint, a set of screwdrivers, a pair of first line tires and so on. His list is of items women often have to purchase such as; a ten-pound turkey, a pair of pantyhose, a large box of detergent and etc.

Couples are also given blank budget forms. (Credit Counseling Centers, n.d.) We suggest they fill them out separately and then compare their plans. We ask what it might mean if one or both partners refuse to fill out the forms for their own use.

A ten minute break for refreshments follows this section.

---

* Permission to use this sheet may be obtained from Changing Times, The Kiplinger Washington Editors, Inc., 1729 H Street, N.W.,Washington, D.C.

Adjustments and Priorities (35 minutes)

A short talk, maximum length of ten minutes, raises the issue that everyone comes from different family backgrounds, and consequently learns different values and customs. Each person learns what his family considers to be 'the right way to live.' Each has a unique expectation of what it is to be married. This talk leads into using the Marital Roles Inventory* which is an easily understood test. It is designed to help persons gauge their relative valuing of several aspects of marital roles. (Hurvitz, 1965 and 1961)

Men and women are sent to opposite sides of the room. Each has a list of eleven statements describing a husband's roles in marriage, and a separate list of eleven statements describing a wife's roles in marriage. Each person ranks the statements in both lists in his order of priority. Only one item on each list can be number 1 or number 2 and so on. When everyone has finished the ranking procedure, couples get back together and compare their inventories. They will be comparing his roles with her expectations of his roles, and her roles with his expectations of her roles. Statements include the following:

I do my jobs around the house
I am a companion to my husband (wife)
I serve as a model of men (women) for my children
I am a sexual partner to my wife (husband)

If, for example, they both rank companionship first or second this leads into a discussion of what they expect of each other as companions. Greater similarity of expectations can be anticipated. It is a different story if one ranks companionship first, and the other ranks it seventh in priority. The facilitator can encourage most couples to share their comparative rankings of statements with others in the small group. A lively group can develop an intense and involving discussion. The more people in the group who are willing to participate in this the better: it gives couples and individuals immediate feedback on the way they have expressed their expectations through the inventory.

Some persons get very angry with the word or concept of 'role.' They say it is artificial, confining and stereotyping. They are generally receptive to the idea that here role is used to mean function. If the speaker can remain calm, and explain that couples do establish a pattern or system in their relationship, and that the inventory will help each couple become more aware of the pattern each couple member hopes to create, the individuals generally feel able to get something out of the exercise.

A ten minute refreshment break follows this section.

---

* Published by Western Psychological Services, Box 775, Beverly Hills, California. WPS kindly allowed me to reword the instructions on the Inventory so that it would be more appropriate for engaged couples.

Communication Skills (35 minutes)

This section begins with a ten minute talk, asking such questions as, what is your style of expressing yourself; what is your fiance's style ? Do you hint at what you want, are you blunt or direct, or do you wait for someone to guess at your needs ? The speaker also talks about the expression of feelings, in particular secondary feelings. Secondary feelings are, for example, the feelings a person has when he receives an expensive gift and, in addition to feeling pleased, feels guilty about having so much money spent on him. The guilt is the secondary feeling. The 'punch line' in this part of the talk is that a lot of misunderstanding can be avoided if both primary and secondary feelings are expressed and clearly labelled. If an attempt is made to cover up the secondary feeling, it often appears that the person is being insincere in his expression of the primary feeling.

It goes without saying that in 35 minutes, couples will not learn a whole range of communication skills. They can, however, become aware of areas that require skills, and hopefully begin to question whether they have the skills, and if so, are they using them. The exercises that follow can help to accelerate the process of directing attention away from skills in general, to an examination of each couple's use of some of the skills.

Exercise 1. Indirect "No"

The speaker reads out the instructions. Facilitators assist couples in staying on the topic. Instructions:

> I want one of you to ask for something that you know your fiance doesn't want to give you. Continue to ask for this same thing repeatedly. Each time you ask, I want your partner to say "No," without actually saying "No." Be aware of how you evade your partner's demand without actually refusing it openly. Do this for about two minutes. Now switch places, so that the one who has been asking for something now has to refuse his fiance's repeated request without actually saying "No." Again do this for about two minutes. Now share your experience of doing this. What did you learn about your own and your fiance's way of saying "No" indirectly ? (Stevens, 1971: 192) (original instructions slightly reworded.)

Exercise 2. Rating Arguing Skills

The speaker briefly compares a functional argument with a disfunctional one. Bach and Wyden, and Espy are good source materials for content on this topic. (Bach and Wyden, 1968) (Espy, 1971) In brief, a functional argument stays on topic, does not rehash old fights. The angry person states clearly what makes him angry, and how angry he is.

The other person reflects that he has heard both parts of this, and then describes where he stands. Shouting, name calling, sullen silence, physical abuse or scapegoating are all disfunctional.

When couples indicate that they understand the difference between functional and disfunctional arguing styles, they are then asked to apply this understanding to their own situation. Separately, each person rates, on a scale from 1 (disfunctional) to 10 (functional) the arguing skills of the following:

a) the individual's parents
b) his future in-laws
c) his fiance
d) himself

While rating is in progress, the facilitators have to observe carefully to ensure that couples do not do a shared job on the rating procedure. When this has been completed, the couples can share their ratings. If there is a discrepency in their ratings the speaker can ask what it means to them. A short ammount of time is allowed for them to discuss their findings. The couples are encouraged to continue their conversations on this topic when they get home after the program.

Exercise 3. Shulmans' Marriage Agreement*

The speaker suggests that they all will establish a pattern of dividing up household and parenting tasks. Since they have been raised in different families, most likely they have different plans and preferences for who will or should do what. As an example of what one couple finally agreed on, Shulmans' Marriage Agreement is passed out. (Shulman, 1971)

Example: Section 10 of Shulmans' Marriage Agreement

> Cleaning: Husband does dishes Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Wife does Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Friday is split according to who has done extra work during the week. Husband does all housecleaning in exchange for wife's extra childcare (3 to 6 daily) and sick care.

When couples have had time to read the Agreement, the speaker asks who would like their marriage to follow Shulmans' Agreement. Some of the women like it, but most of the men do not. Some men even get angry just from reading it. The speaker then asks for a show of hands by the couples who have actually worked out a specific agreement. Most often, few if any have an agreement. The'punch line' is: "So you don't like Shulmans' Agreement, but you have nothing worked out yet. When are you going to do some explicit planning to find out who will do what in your marriage ?"

---

*Mrs. Alix Kates Shulman wrote in a personal communication: "... I do not think that good intentions are enough or that there are any personal solutions to what is really a political and social problem. More important than making a marriage agreement is building a feminist movement. PLEASE TELL THIS TO ANYONE TO WHOM YOU GIVE A COPY OF MY AGREEMENT."

Shulman also said that "Part of the reason for thinking out a contract is to find out what your problems are; it forces you to take charge of your life. Once you have the contract, you don't have to refer back to it. The process is what's important." (Shulman, 1971)

At this point in a two-session program the first session ends. If there is time to spare, couples may stay in their groups and rehash some of the materials. As couples leave, they are given a copy of one of two books for them to read and discuss. Currently, we give them either The Freedom of Sexual Love (Bird and Bird, 1970), or Marriage is for Grownups (Bird and Bird, 1971). We also loan them copies of Mosaic (Mercure and Dolphin, 1972). Mosaic is a boxed collection of loose leaf booklets which looks at marriage in a reflective way. There are many open-ended questions for the couple to ponder. From experience, we have found that more of the Mosaics are returned if we ask one person in each couple to sign out their copy. It is sometimes more convenient to handle this whole procedure with books and the Mosaic at the beginning of the session.

SECOND SESSION

This session begins with the couples checking in their copies of Mosaic as they enter the meeting room. They are then ushered to the same groups where they were seated at the previous session.

The content of this session begins with the topic 'Parenthood.'

Parenthood (50 minutes)

Talking about children, and how to prepare for raising them, brings out the worst in many people. Ask a decent average couple to speak on 'Parenthood' and they suddenly become inflexible, full of divine authority, and insistent that they have The Right Way to raise children. Hence speakers for this topic need to be carefully chosen.

This section begins with a ten to fifteen minute talk having a twofold purpose. Firstly the goal is to alert engaged couples to the idea that parenthood is an important topic, one to discuss before marriage, and before children are born. Secondly, the talk tries to zero in on this aspect of the couples' relationships, asking them why do they want to have children, when will they be ready to have them, how many do they want, and how will they feel if they wanted, for example, a girl first, and they have a boy first. The question of what happens to the wife's career is also raised. The speaker can suggest that a key factor is whether or not the parents can convey to the child the feeling that they are glad he or she exists. It can also be mentioned that raising a child is not continuous fun and joy. Children upset schedules and parents get furious. The speaker also suggests the need to

agree on how discipline and affection will be shown by the parents to the child. Speakers may need practice in asking questions and raising points rather than prescribing remedies.

Following the talk, and a brief period to answer any questions, the groups work on the exercise described below for the remainder of the time period.

Parenthood Exercise.

Facilitators have two packs of eight cards. Each pack is numbered one through eight. The green pack is for the men; the white pack for the women. The process of this exercise is the same as for the Money Management Exercise (p.7 of this paper). The exercise serves to get the group working together again after the week long break since the first session.

Each person in turn reads out their vignette, and indicates how they might handle the situation. The facilitator can check with the reader's fiance to see if he is happy with such an approach. If a person refuses to read their vignette, he can be given another one from the spares, or he may swap cards with another group member.

Example: WOMAN #3

When you visit your inlaws they say that they want your children to be happy. They allow - even encourage - the children to break those rules you have tried so hard to have the children follow. You protest, politely. They laughingly ignore your protest, and tell you not to be stuffy. They continue to allow rule breaking.

Example: MAN #7

You are in a hurry to go someplace and are driving at 62 mph in a 50 mph zone. Your child tells you about the 50 mph sign, but you ignore the comment. A couple of minutes later, a policeman stops you for speeding. You don't want a ticket. What do you say to the policeman: what do you say to your child later ?

Some groups will need help and encouragement from the facilitator to ponder the vignettes and to discuss beyond the "yes-no" type of answers. Most groups, however, will continue their discussion even through the break which follows this topic, and will, on their own, work on the spare cards not used in the first time around.

A ten minute break for refreshments follows this section.

Sexuality in Marriage (90 minutes)

This topic area is covered in four parts: film, talk, question time and exercise.

Film (20 minutes)

It is not easy to find a good film that adequately covers sexuality at a high school or college level. Showing 18 to 30 year olds an antiquated film geared for seventh graders is worse than no film at all.

We have found three films that are adequate: Achieving Sexual Maturity (John Wiley, Inc., 1973) and The Sexually Mature Adult (John Wiley, Inc., 1973). The third film, Having a Healthy Baby (Churchill Films, 1971), is an alternative if it is desirable to focus on aspects of prenatal care. Basically the film serves two purposes: to provide information and to get couples in a receptive mood for the talk that follows.

Talk on Sexuality in Marriage (30 minutes)

This talk can be given by a doctor, nurse or family life educator. It seems almost unnecessary to mention that the speaker's ability to talk on sexuality should be assessed in advance. If he or she blushes or stammers when words like sex, orgasm or foreplay are mentioned, the talk will collapse. College students, in particular, are unresponsive to speakers who's facts are incorrect, who are unversed in Masters and Johnson's findings, or who offer vague platitudes such as "Treat her as a woman should be treated and you will never have problems in bed." It is a good precaution to give the speaker copies of An Analysis of Human Sexual Response (Brecher and Brecher, 1966) and An Analysis of Human Sexual Inadequacy (Robbins and Robbins, 1970) several weeks before the program is scheduled.

The talk itself touches on the following areas: the importance of a premarital physical examination, sexual response in the male and female, psychological aspects of sexuality, menstruation, pregnancy, miscarriage, previous sexual experience, the honeymoon, and birth control. Birth control, the comparison of methods, and aspects of reliability and side effects are almost always a topic of interest. However, if the sponsoring organization is the Catholic Church, the talk is generally focused in agreement with this church'es teachings.

Question Time (20 minutes)

Each person is asked to use a small sheet of paper (provided) and to write down a question or questions he would like the speaker to answer. If he has no questions, he is to write 'no question.' The folded sheets are collected and passed to the speaker. This provides an opportunity for everyone to get specific questions answered. If the speaker made a good general presentation, he can anticipate being asked some challenging and searching questions.

Religious Dimensions in Marriage (35 minutes)

Some people might find this to be an unnecessary topic. However, everyone - atheist, agnostic, casual or devoutly religious, has a feeling about the place of religion in marriage. Some want their faith to be the core of their marriage, others prefer to exclude religion entirely from marriage. In any case, religion is an emotion evoking subject. Couples need to know where each other stands relative to this issue in marriage. Can a difference be respected, or is it seen as a threat or made the taget of belittling remarks ?

This is a difficult talk to give because points are easily misheard. The speaker, generally a clergyman, describes the differences between inward belief and outward practice of religion. Questions are raised such as, what do you feel is a comfortable way to live your beliefs ? How do you feel if your future spouse does not want to live this way ? The possible latitude between inward belief and outward practice can be more dramatic if one partner had a liturgical religious upbringing (Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Orthodox or Jewish) and the other did not.

Another area where religion enters into marriage is in the raising of children. Will any children born into the marriage be instructed in a religious faith ? If so, how will they be instructed and in which church'es or synagogue's set of beliefs and practices ? Other points which can be raised include: what degree of outward observance do the couple plan for their children, what quality of inward belief do they wish their children to have, and so on.

The area of child raising and religious instruction is covered in part by each denomination as part of their teachings. Generally, if this program is sponsored by a particular denomination, the host clergyman can give a clear, concise explanation of his church'es teachings on marriage, the procreation of children and their religious instruction.

Finally, the clergyman can ask three or four couples to help him do a 'dress rehearsal' of a typical wedding ceremony.

Couples of different faiths (different here understood to mean everything from devout members of two widely differing faiths, to the other extreme where both are of the same denomination, but belong to different congregations) are encouraged to attend each other's religious service and make notes on the sermon. After the service they can compare notes to gauge how closely they 'hear' what has been preached. (Knox, 1972) This can be especially beneficial for the non-religious person planning to marry someone who insists on a church-centered family life.

A ten minute break for refreshments follows this section.

Exercise (20 minutes)

Each couple is sent away from their group and asked to privately discuss a list of questions on sexual behavior. The list has little to do with knowledge of sexuality or anatomy. The focus is on the expectations each has of their sexual relationship in marriage. The questions are relevant no matter how much or how little 'experience' a person has had.

Instructions to couples

Take turns in asking each other each question. Ask for clarification if you do not understand your fiance's feelings. Avoid being critical or judgemental if you do not understand or find it hard to share your fiance's feelings or concerns.

1. Imagine how often each week you would want to have intercourse.
2. When we have intercourse, how would you feel if I don't have an orgasm ?
3. How will I know if you are in the mood for intercourse ?
4. How will I know you are in the mood for affection, closeness, touching, but not in the mood to make love ?

There are a number of other questions on their lists. If they do not have time to consider them during the program, they will be encouraged to discuss them when they get home.

After the couples have had time to consider their feelings and expectations relative to these questions (about 15 minutes), the groups reform. The facilitator asks each person how he or she felt discussing the questions with their future spouse. Persons are not asked to share the content of their answers to the questions. The facilitator does not teach, or evaluate responses. If all the group members express that it was difficult or embarrassing for them to discuss the questions, the facilitator may reflect this. He can encourage them to talk more about the questions at their next opportunity to be alone, and for each couple to assess why it was hard for them to discuss questions.

The session closes with general discussion, rehashing topics, delving into new areas, critiquing the program, depending on the time remaining and the interest of each small group. Every person is asked to fill out an evaluation form which asks what he did and did not like about the program, and if parts were helpful or destructive to their relationship.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROGRAM

This program would be easier to run, and areas could be covered in more depth if it was split into three or six sessions instead of two.

Local needs do not make this feasible in Lansing, Michigan. If more time were available, it would be devoted to more exercises and small group discussion. Couples' evaluations over the last two years stress overwhelmingly that lectures are resented. Short talks seem welcomed, but the strongest request is for plenty of time to talk with other couples.

Our initial discussion sessions were totally unstructured. It took consumate skill and a very relaxed group to get discussion going beyond social nicities. Canned questions were little better. The structured exercises focus discussion, yet allow individuals to share their opinions and feelings, and to learn from others in their group.

This program does not meet the needs of a single unattached person interested in learning more about marriage in general. It is designed to assist a couple look more closely at aspects of their relationship. An individual in search of information can get some basics from a high school or university course in marriage and family living. A more effective alternative, involving a greater personal investment, would be to start with The Students' Guide to Marriage and Family Life Literature: An Aid to Individualized Study, (Kirkendall and Adams, 1971). The individual could then follow up references of interest.

It may seem trite to rehearse a wedding ceremony for a group composed mainly of university students. However, the evaluations indicate that this is a welcomed part of the program. Perhaps watching a rehearsal helps to diminish anxiety, particularly so if the rehearsal is conducted in a relaxed manner by a friendly minister.

Having persons write anonymous questions for the speaker on sexuality seems hardly necessary in this age of sexual preoccupation. Our experience confirms the contrary. Without anonymity the questions are few and superficial; the atmosphere in the room is one of discomfort. Anonymity of the questioner produces an avalanche of probing questions - provided that the speaker has given a reasonably good talk initially.

There are four points of structure worth mentioning. In our experience, we have found it best to limit the size of the total group to 48 couples. Fewer couples, 16 to 25 is ideal. Small groups have a maximum of five couples, four being ideal. Larger total or small groups seem to produce a feeling of regimentation among participants, and discussion too easily becomes squelched.

Thirdly is the question of tables. Some people feel a table is a necessary part of group structure in this type of program. We have found that tables inhibit discussion and no longer use tables with any of the groups. If people insist on having a table, a round one is by far the best. A square table might be usable, but a rectangular table will produce two lines of silent people.

Even though the church basement or school gym may generally be used for large gatherings, it is best to find a room that is clean, comfortable, and that has windows. Dirty, poorly-lighted church basements or cavanous gymnasiums have a detrimental impact on the atmosphere of the program.

It is vitally important that the host couple, speakers and facilitators feel and work as a team. This can be achieved through one or more training sessions. The team spirit is infectious and markedly enhances the mood and progress of sessions.

Since getting away from the lecture approach to marriage preparation, we have made the following observations:

1. There are fewer angry evaluations condemning the program. Previously we had about 20 per cent; now it is down to 5 or 6 per cent. The main complaint comes from Catholics angry that their church requires them to attend a Catholic sponsored program.

2. We get more positive responses of the type: "I'm pleasantly surprised." "It was good, much better than I had expected."

3. The incidence of doodling on note pads is drastically reduced.

4. Previously as many as 20 per cent of the couples did not return for the second session. Now only about 5 per cent do not return, and it is not unusual for them to phone our office and explain their absense.

5. Clergy report an increase in unsolicited positive remarks about the program.

6. The number of unreturned Mosaics (loaned to couples for the program) has dropped by 75 per cent.

The researcher will rightly note that these are subjective evaluations. We do not have a control group for comparison, nor do we have an exact description from month to month of who attends our programs. We do know that close to two-thirds of the participants have at least one year of university, and that more than half the couples are entering an interfaith marriage. I have a follow-up study in progress. 300 couples were tested at the beginning of the program, and are being followed-up one year after their weddings.*

There is some support for the contention that marriage preparation programs help couples become better prepared for marriage, but these

* Author's dissertation study. It is anticipated that findings will be published late in 1974.

studies are rather thin on methodology. (Morris, 1957), (Dyer, 1959) (Rue, 1972)

This program is not the final design. Future plans include giving some 'process' homework between sessions. This will consist of Knox and Patrick's technique in which individuals first estimate and then record just how much time they spend in a variety of activities. (Knox and Patrick, 1971)

Alternative texts will be provided. Currently one of the best is Thinking About Marriage (Wallis, 1963) in which the author clearly shows the connections between a person's expectations of marriage and his upbringing. The best book we have examined is Mace's most recent contribution Getting Ready for Marriage (Mace, 1972). This book will be welcomed by motivated couples who want to assess the process of their relationship. Only its price, $3.75, make it impractical for us to give this book out to couples in quantity. Other organizations planning a marriage preparation program, may have more generous funding and be able to give out this book.

An all-day program is planned which will incorporate more advanced gestalt exercises (Stevens, 1971) and possibly utilize the Inventory of Marital Conflicts (Olson and Ryder, 1970) in place of the current sections on Adjustments and Priorities, and Communication Skills.

The question is often asked, "How do you get through to engaged couples ?" The answer changes and evolves. So must a marriage preparation program if it is to remain viable.

Copies of the Host Couple's Manual may be obtained by writing to:

Marriage Preparation Office
Suite 301
300 N. Washington
Lansing, Michigan, 48933

Please enclose a check for $5.00 to cover cost of manual and postage.

REFERENCES

Bach, George R. and Peter Wyden. The Intimate Enemy. New York: Avon Books, 1968.

Bird, Joseph and Lois Bird. Marriage is for Grownups. New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1971.

Bird, Joseph and Lois Bird. The Freedom of Sexual Love. New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1970.

Brecher, Ruth and Edward Brecher. An Analysis of Human Sexual Response. New York: Signet Books, 1966.

Burgess, Ernest W. and Paul Wallin. Engagement and Marriage. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1953, 485-502.

Clarke, Carl. Group Leader's Manual for Marital Enrichment Groups. 1971, (mimeograph)

Clarke, Carl. Group Procedures for Increasing Positive Feedback between Marital Partners. The Family Coordinator, 1970, 19, 324-328.

Consumers Union Report on Life Insurance, The. Mount Vernon, New York: Consumers Union, 1967.

*Cost of Operating an Automobile. U.S. Department of Transportation, April 1972. Price 25¢

Credit Counseling Centers Inc. Family Money Management System (income budgeting forms)

Duncan, Rodger Dean. Until Debt Do Us Part. Marriage, 1973, 55, 4

Dyer, Dorothy. A Comparative Study Relating Marital Happiness to University Courses Helpful in Marital Adjustment. Marriage and Family Living, 1959, 21, 230-232.

Espy, Hilda. Hidden Anger Can Wreck Your Marriage. Family Circle, January, 1971.

*Family Food Budgeting. U.S.D.A., Home and Garden Bulletin No. 94, 1971 Stock Number 0100-1377, Price 15¢

Hurvitz, Nathan. Marital Roles Inventory Manual. Beverly Hills, California: Western Psychological Services, 1961.

Hurvitz, Nathan. The Marital Roles Inventory as a Counseling Instrument. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1965, 27, 492-501.

Kirkendall, Lester A. and Wesley J. Adams. The Students' Guide to Marriage and Family Life Literature: An Aid to Individualized Study. Fifth Edition. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1971.

Knox, David. Preparation for Marriage - Beyond the Classroom. Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Council on Family Relations, Portland, Oregon, November 1972.

Knox, David and Junior A. Patrick. You Are What You Do: A New Approach in Preparation for Marriage. The Family Coordinator, 1971, 20, 109-114.

Mace, David R. Getting Ready for Marriage. Nashville: Abingdon, 1972, 9.

Mercure, Julien and Frank Dolphin (Eds.). Mosaic. Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, 1972.

Morris, Kenneth J. A Study of Premarital Counseling in Relation to a Survey of Marital Adjustment. Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1957.

Olson, David H. and Robert G. Ryder. Inventory of Marital Conflicts (IMC): An Experimental Interaction Procedure. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1970, 32, 443-448.

Palmer, Sally E. Economic Conflict in Marriage. The Social Worker/ Le Travailleur Social, 1972, 40, 145-153.

Robbins, Jhan and June Robbins. An Analysis of Human Sexual Inadequacy. New York: Signet Books, 1970.

Rolfe, David J. Financial Priorities Inventory. Copyright, 1972. Copies may be obtained by writing to PO Box 279, Dimondale, Michigan, 48821.

Rolfe, David J. The Financial Priorities Inventory. paper submitted to The Family Coordinator, 1973.

Rue, James J. Premarital Counseling For Teenagers. Marriage, 1972, 54, 60-66.

*Selecting and Financing a Home. U.S.D.A. Home and Garden Bulletin No. 182, April 1972. Price 15¢

A Shopper's Guide to Life Insurance. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Insurance Department, 1972.

A Shopper's Guide to Term Life Insurance. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Insurance Department, 1972.

Shulman, Alix. The Shulmans' Marriage Agreement. Redbook Magazine, August 1971, 72.

Stevens, John O. Awareness: Exploring, Experimenting, Experiencing. Lafayette, California: Real People Press, 1971, 192.

Wallis, J.H. Thinking About Marriage. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1963.

Watkins, Art. Complete Guide to Family Money Management. New York: The Family Circle Inc., 1973.

You Paid How Much For That ? Changing Times - The Kiplinger Magazine, June 1972, 36.

* Items may be purchased from: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.